

# MATTHEW

## Chapter 25

### *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*

**“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup> “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ <sup>7</sup> “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ <sup>12</sup> “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ <sup>13</sup> “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

**25:1-13** This part of Matthew’s Gospel is perfectly placed as Jesus prepares for his most important work yet—the cross. In ch 24 Jesus speaks about signs of the end. Then in ch 25 he emphasizes the need to be ready by teaching three parables, including our text. He begins with the parable of the ten virgins, then the parable of the talents, and finally, the parable of the sheep and goats, last week’s Gospel. This emphasis by Jesus can never be taken too lightly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

This parable, with its wedding theme, has been the source of considerable debate over the centuries. It is found in Matthew alone. However, a wedding theme is used elsewhere in Scripture, either directly or implied. (See Is 62:5; Mt 22:1–14; Eph 5:25–32; Rev 19:7; 21–22.). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The parable can be divided into two parts (25:1b-5 and 25:6-12), with a formulaic introduction (25:1a) and a concluding exhortation appended (25:13). Here the introduction, “at that time the reign of heaven will be like”, alerts the readers/hearers to an emphasis on the future the future full manifestation of the reign of heaven; this corresponds to the emphasis in this second half of the Eschatological Discourse on the Parousia and the age’s consummation. (CC)

**25:1** KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - *hē basileia tōn ouranōn*, translated literally, “the kingdom of the heavens.” This is the last time in this Gospel that this expression

appears. Lenski (R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943] 961–63) states that Matthew is alone in the use of this phrase, and it appears more than 30 times in his Gospel. The other Gospel writers use the phrase “the kingdom of God,” which appears rarely in Matthew. The meaning, the place, however, is the same, the difference minor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

*ten virgins.* The bridesmaids, who were responsible for preparing the bride to meet the bridegroom. (CSB)

Scripture repeatedly compares the relationship between Christ and the Church to that of husband and wife (most famously in Eph 5:22-33). This parable uses similar though distinct imagery. Jesus is the Bridegroom; the virgins represent members of the church on earth. (TLSB)

On the wedding day, the bridegroom would dress in wedding garments, and his friends would escort him to the house of the bride. The bride would come out to meet them with her friends. The whole group would joyously parade to the home that the groom had prepared. Jesus used this imagery to describe His relationship to the Church: “In My Father’s house are many room...I go to prepare a place for...If I go ...I will come again (John 14:2-3). The Christian life is like a betrothal. Heaven will be like marriage. (TLSB)

The ten virgins represent the community of those who claim Christ as Lord, the church. The fact that there is a division among them is simply one more instance of the theme that Matthew features so frequently, namely, that among the visible company of Jesus’ disciples, not all will be found to be true followers when their Master returns. The life of a disciple is characterized by joy and security as well as by challenge and spiritual danger. As with the prior unit (24:45-51), Jesus here us warning his followers to remain vigilant against the possibility of falling away and not being ready or able to honor him when he comes. (CC)

*lamps.* Torches that consisted of a long pole with oil-drenched rags at the top. (Small clay lamps would have been of little use in an outdoor procession.) (CSB)

All of them took their lamps, small, saucer-shaped vessels with a cover; in the middle of which was a small hole for pouring in the oil and for providing air; at one side a spout protruded and the wick came out through this. Such a lamp would not contain enough oil to burn all night, so that to carry it to a prolonged wedding-feast without an extra supply of oil was a strong example of improvidence. (Kretzmann)

**25:2 WERE FOOLISH** – *mōrai*, translated as “foolish.” It is the Greek root for the English word *moron*. Webster’s defines *moron* as a person who is notably stupid or lacking in good judgment. Leon Morris (*The Gospel according to Matthew*

[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] 621) notes the split division of five wise and five foolish. Matthew seems to have an interest in people who behave in foolish ways. The application of this word comes in the fact that all ten virgins had lamps, but five of them were foolish because they took no oil with them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

There are various conclusions about the lamps and the oil mentioned by our Lord. According to Johann Ylvisaker (*The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932] 620–22), the virgins are outwardly alike. In spite of outward appearances five of them did not have any oil. Oil symbolizes spirit and life. In other words, the foolish ones fell away from the faith. Lenski's commentary is similar. The flame of the lamp and its light is faith and its good works. The oil is grace through the Word. The lamp is our outward Christianity. The foolish virgins have the outward signs but inwardly are strangers to Christ. We need to be going back constantly for that oil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The contrast between the foolish and the wise reminds us of the reference to the wise and foolish builders at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24–27). In both places, if we take the wise to be believers and the foolish to be unbelievers, we miss the point. Jesus is preaching to His church. He is warning the foolish to “wise up.” It is a variation of the parable of the sower, in which Jesus warns us about the dangers of the devil (Mt. 13:19, persecution (Mt. 13:21, and covetousness (Mt. 13:22). (PBC)

**25:3 DID NOT TAKE** – Conversion must be coupled with faithful perseverance. Coming to faith will do you no good if you do not stand firm to the end (Mt. 24:13). Or in the imagery of an earlier parable; it is not good enough to accept the invitation to the wedding feast; you must also wear wedding clothes (Mt. 22:11-14). (PBC)

*oil.* Olive oil. (CSB)

The oil in the parable represents whatever it takes for you to be ready to honor the Bridegroom when he comes again in glory. (CC)

Streets if even large cities had no public lighting. The foolish virgins do not consider the possibility that the bridegroom might be delayed, and so they bring no extra oil for their lamps. The oil represents a faith continually sustained by the means of grace, thus able to endure until Christ's return. (TLSB)

Oil symbolizes spirit and life. In other words, the foolish one fell away from the faith. The foolish virgins have the outward signs but inwardly are strangers to Christ. We need to be going back constantly for that oil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

The OT practice of anointing kings, priests, and prophets with olive oil certainly suggests a connect between oil and the Holy Spirit. And the work of the Holy Spirit is masterfully summarized by Martin Luther in his explanation of the Third Article: he calls us to faith by the Gospel, fathers us into his church, enlightens us with his spiritual gifts, sanctifies us for the life of good works, and keeps us in the true faith until our end. (PBC)

**25:4 THE WISE** – The wise virgins, that were thoughtful and used foresight, took an additional supply of oil with them in vessels provided for that purpose; the foolish and improvident, that refused to heed the necessity, took their lamps only. "When the Kingdom is preached, these are the results: Some receive it with all their heart and are serious about it, believe the Word, make the most strenuous efforts to practice good works, let their lamps shine before the world; for they are well provided with lamps and oil, that is, with faith and love: these are represented by the wise virgins. Then there are some that also accept the Gospel, but are sleepy, are not serious about it, think they can succeed with their works, are secure, and believe it can be paid for with works; those are indicated in the foolish virgins. In Scripture those are called foolish that do not obey the Word of God, but follow their own mind, will not be taught, accept no opinion but their own. But it will happen to them at last as it here happened to the foolish virgins. These two kinds of people are in this Kingdom, namely, where the Gospel and the Word of God is preached and there should be exercise of faith: some follow, some do not follow.... Remember, then, in this Gospel that the lamps without oil signify a mere external thing and a bodily exercise without faith in the heart; but the lamps with oil are the internal riches, also the external works with true faith. (Kretzmann)

**25:5 WAS A LONG TIME IN COMING** – Many early Christians expected Jesus' return in their generation. This parable implies that Jesus might not come as quickly as some expected, while encouraging the Church not to lose hope. (TLSB)

The groom's delay in the parable signals that there will be an (undermined) interval of time between the Son's exaltation to God's right hand (22:44) and his return in glory. That glorious return will happen suddenly. You cannot get ready; you just need to be ready. Entrance into the wedding feast with the bridegroom refers to entering the fullness of eschatological life and salvation. (CC)

**25:6 AT MIDNIGHT** – The Jews often expected the Messiah to arrive at midnight, the time of the Passover visitation. The arrival at midnight certainly should not be taken as a literal prediction. The idea is that they be prepared like the people waiting for the Passover.

The bridegroom suddenly appears at midnight, when many eyes are heavy. (TLSB)

**25:7 ALL THE VIRGINS WOKE UP** – The fact that they were asleep suggests that all carried on the reasonable routine of daily life. The problem was that five were not prepared for the pleasant interruption of that routine. Sleep here is not sloth to be condemned; lack of preparation for the sudden awakening was the problem. The point is not to flee the responsibilities of daily life and sit on the rooftops until Christ comes again. The point is to look with a kind of split vision – one eye on the God-given tasks set before us here in our vocation, the other eye watching for the groom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*trimmed.* The charred ends of the rags were cut off and oil was added. (CSB)

Adjusted the wicks to make them burn brightly. (TLSB)

Everyone's lamp has gone out during the period of waiting. With lamps out, the virgins prepare them quickly and then light the wicks, it is at that point that the foolish virgins realize that they need more oil, and they ask the wise virgins to give some to them. (CC)

All of the virgins quickly jumped up and trimmed the wicks of their lamps, in order that they might be burning with full brightness as they entered into the wedding-feast. (Kretzmann)

**25:8-9** By the time the bridegroom arrives, it is too late to prepare. Hill: "In other words, no one can be aided by the works and merits of another, because it is necessary for everyone to buy oil for his own lamp" (Ap XXI 30). (TLSB)

**25:8 GIVE US** – The improvident virgins were not ready for the emergency, their lamps, whose oil had been consumed, were at the point of going out, there was a mere glimmering of a dry wick. But their appeal to the prudent virgins met with a cold reception. If their request were granted, there was danger that they all would lack oil and be refused admission to the marriage festival. (Kretzmann)

**25:9 NO THEY REPLIED** – The fact that all must fend for themselves underscores the individuality of the Christian faith. We cannot rely on the merits of others or the intercession of saints. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The crux is this: what matters most is meeting the bridegroom with appropriate celebration. Nothing can be allowed to put that in jeopardy. The point is being ready to honor the groom when the time to honor him has arrived. (CC)

This is not selfishness, but sound prudence. In the emergency of Christ's coming to Judgment, the helpfulness of the Christian life is a thing of the past, and the bands of friendship and even of the closest relationship are torn asunder. The time of grace is at an end. The merchants, the dispensers of God's grace, have

definitely closed their shops. Everyone must stand on his own merits. "That is a clap of thunder against those that rely upon the merits of the saints and other people; since none of them has enough for himself, not to speak of having something left over to impart to others. (Kretzmann)

*there may not be enough.* Torches required large amounts of oil in order to keep burning, and the oil had to be replenished about every 15 minutes. (CSB)

**25:10** *marriage feast.* The future glory of heaven is repeatedly compared to the joy and intimacy of a wedding feast (cf 22:1–14; Is 25:6–9). (TLSB)

*shut.* Once this door was shut, there was no possibility of entry into the feast. (TLSB)

Therefore, when they now want to come and knock, and would also like to go in to the wedding, they will have to hear, as did the foolish virgins: I know you not; those that were to come in have come in. That will be a terrible sentence. The frantic attempts of the imprudent virgins to provide fuel for their lamps were without avail. And, in the meantime, the festival procession reached the home of the bride. Those that were fully prepared in every respect went with the bride groom and were seated at the festival board, whereupon the door was locked. Fatal words, shutting off all hope! (Kretzmann)

**25:11–12** *Lord, lord ... I do not know you.* Words echoing 7:21–23, where Jesus warns His audience that He will recognize and admit into the kingdom of heaven only those who do the will of His Father. (TLSB)

**25:11** SIR! SIR! – The foolish virgins return too late. Their double “Sir! Sir! Is laden with much the same emotions we noted in Jesus’ lament, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...(Mt. 23:37). They illustrate Jesus’ warning at the close of His Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to me , ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’” (Mt. 7:21-23). (PBC)

When it was too late, the other virgins came. It is not stated whether they had any success in their quest. But they made an attempt to gain admittance to the wedding-feast. (Kretzmann)

**25:12** Without success! With solemn emphasis they are told: I know you not. Their terror, repentance, and despair "have come too late; they have neglected their opportunity; they have forfeited their happiness. (Kretzmann)

**25:13** KEEP WATCH –Jesus warns all of us with the imperative *grēgoreite*, translated “Watch!” from the verb *grēgoreō*, translated “I watch.” Some suggest

that the Christian dwell on this to the point of separating oneself from the church's mission in the world. We can't accomplish much of the Great Commission if we are always looking into the sky. However, when we focus on our Lord and his teaching, we focus on Law and Gospel. It is this kind of Christian lifestyle that keeps faith healthy. A healthy faith is a faith that is constantly ready for the Day of the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

**25:1–13** Jesus warns that many invited to share in the eternal joy of His kingdom will miss out by failing to have a living faith at the end. Though some will be condemned for heinous crimes and gross sins, many more will fail to enter heaven because they neglected their faith. Even so, no matter how depleted our faith is, Jesus' grace can fill us to overflowing with a single word. • Keep us ever filled to overflowing, O Lord, that we continually abound in faith, hope, and love for You. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Talents*

**14** “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. **15** To one he gave five talents<sup>a</sup> of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. **16** The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. **17** So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. **18** But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ **21** “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’ **22** “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ **23** “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’ **24** “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25** So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ **26** “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? **27** Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. **28**’ “Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. **29** For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what

**he has will be taken from him. <sup>30</sup> And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

Aspects of the parable are easy enough to interpret, and all flow from the obvious central point: the master in the parable is Jesus himself. This means that in advance, Matthew's readers/hearers will believe that the master is good and gracious, whose authority to call his disciples to faithful service is completely valid. The slaves represent those who publicly claim the identity of being Jesus' disciples. The statement in 25:15 that the master entrusted differing amounts "to each according to his own ability" shows the wisdom and kindness of the master. (CC - Luz)

What might be a careful decoding of the "talents" in the parable? The closest parallel may occur in Jesus' direct teaching to his disciples in 13:11-12. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, declares, "To know the mysteries of the reign of heaven has been given to you. Jesus' disciples are to work with all that has been entrusted to them for the honor and advantage of the master. (CC)

**25:14-15** The master represents Jesus, the servants stand for believers, and the talents symbolize the various gifts God places into their stewardship. (TLSB)

**25:14 AGAIN (KINGDOM OF HEAVEN)** – The object of this parable was to show, that our blessings come from God, we are accountable to Him, and should so use them as to meet His approbation. (CB)

Another parable about the end times. (TLSB)

Point of Comparison – As the servants were responsible for their talents, so men are responsible for the use they make of their abilities. (Syllabus for Sermon Theory II)

Central Truth – Be an active Christian. (Syllabus for Sermon Theory II)

It is not difficult to see that Jesus is telling His disciples that before long He will be leaving them. He will suffer and die and rise again and ascend into heaven. But that will not mean the work of His kingdom will stop in this world. No, He will rather provide His disciples with everything they need in order to continue that work. (PBC)

The outstanding fulfillment of that promise came on the Day of Pentecost, when the ascended Lord sent the Holy Spirit upon His disciples at Jerusalem. He thereby supplied them with the necessary understanding of the Word of God and God's whole plan of salvation – as well as the courage to proclaim that message unto the ends of the earth. (PBC)



The transition from the previous parable to this one is very abrupt, indicating a very close connection in thought. It is the question of faithfulness and its test in the judgment of the last great day. Since the hour of the Lord's return is unknown to us, and since He will require a reckoning from us, therefore the lesson of this parable is so important. (Kretzmann)

ENTRUSTED HIS PROPERTY – Masters frequently put trusted servants in charge of their estate (cf. Gen 24:2). (TLSB)

Christ's meaning is plain. The rich man is God Himself. The servants are those that profess faith in Him, who are His followers. To these God delivers spiritual gifts and goods, the means of grace, His Holy Spirit, all the Christian virtues, ability along the various lines of work in His kingdom. To every one, to each individual, God has given spiritual gifts to be used in His service, 1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:10. He knows the intellectual as well as the moral strength of every one, and is sure that He expects too much from no one. But He wants to see results, in the individual and in the whole Church. He wants to have each one invest the talents he has received with all energy, to work unceasingly in His service. It pleases Him to give a reward of mercy to those that are faithful in these small things, in their own little sphere. To them He will give a partnership in the joys of the Kingdom above. But woe unto the small, mean-spirited weakling, the slothful servant, that refuses to invest his talent, to make use of his gifts and abilities in that sphere of activity where the Lord has placed him. He thereby shows that he is not worthy of the Lord's bounty and cares nothing for His grace. There are few excuses so poor and so miserable in sound as those by which professing Christians attempt to evade work in the Church. All the more terrible, then, will be the Lord's sentence: From him that hath not even that which he hath shall be taken away. (Kretzmann)

**25:15** *talent*. The term was first used for a unit of weight (about 75 pounds), then for a unit of coinage. The present-day use of "talent" to indicate an ability or gift is derived from this parable (see note on Lk 19:13). (CSB)

Gk monetary unit. A silver talent was worth c 7,300 denarii (a denarius equals one day's wage), and a gold talent could be 30 times more valuable. Sizable amounts of money are in play here. (TLSB)

To be sure, the monetary amounts entrusted to the various slaves are significant; recall that a talent (originally a measure of weight) was a lot of money in the ancient world, and one talent – the smallest amount entrusted – would be about six thousand day's wages, something like twenty years of salary. (CC)

The talents that our ascended Lord distributes to all believers are never exactly the same for any two individual (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11). But one gift is basic, and that is faith. Each of us must confess with Martin Luther, "I cannot by own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him," Faith is not

a gift we can get along without, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). (PBC)

The talents that Jesus gives us include all the intellectual and physical abilities we are born with and those we develop as we mature. Our talents include all the material passions that rightfully come into our hands. And they include the many opportunities God provides us for using our talents to serve Him and our neighbor. (PBC)

Considering the fact that the talent, as Jesus uses the term, is money, it is surprising how seldom this parable is applied to our stewardship of money. We are quick to apply it to our skills and abilities, and even to our time, but surely Jesus also has something to say here about how we spend our money. It is not only the envelope we put into the offering on Sunday that concerns Jesus; the money we spend on groceries and recreation is also part of Christian stewardship. Whether you have been give five talents or two or one, God is looking for faithfulness. (PBC)

EACH ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITY – Representing the various gifts which God bestows on different individuals. All our blessings we receive from God, and to Him we are justly accountable for the use of them. He does not give the same to all, and He requires only according to what a man hath. Of course, no one will be condemned for not having received more. (CB)

Jesus had a reason for making the servant with only one talent the unfaithful one. If it had been one of the servants with more talents, we would be too inclined to say, “What a shame! What a terrible thing that a person so richly blessed should be so ungrateful to God! But, of course, my gifts are not very numerous or great, so the Lord surely cannot expect much from me. (PBC)

Most of us would place ourselves into the category of the servant who received only one talent. That may be where most of us belong. But that surely is no excuse for being unfaithful with the talent God has given us. It will not do at all for any of us to say, “I can’t do much; so it is all right if I don’t anything. It won’t make any difference.” (PBC)

It may be true that the work of God’s kingdom will get done without the support of those who have very limited means and talents. But we need to realize that God calls upon us to serve Him with out individual talents, not because He cannot get along without our help, but rather because faithful service to Him is of great value to those who the serving. (PBC)

Martin Luther’s explanation of the Lord’s Prayer in his Small Catechism says it very well: “The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer; of itself; but we pray in this petition that it come unto us also.” And: “The gracious good will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it be done

with us also.” We cannot stop God. We cannot prevent Him from doing His gracious work in our world. But we can deprive ourselves of the blessed opportunity to share in that work. “From this preserve us, heavenly Father!” (PBC)

**25:16** PUT HIS MONEY TO WORK – Showing the good improvement he made of what was given him. (CB)

*traded.* Though the nature of their business is not specified, both men earned 100 percent profit. (TLSB)

The first two move in tandem, differentiated only by the number of talents entrusted to them. They apparently believe that as slaves of this particular master, they have a purpose and that is to serve him and seek to increase his possessions. (CC)

**25:18** HID HIS MASTER’S MONEY – Where he would have no trouble in taking care of it, while he ought to have traded with it for his lord’s profit. This shows that a failure to improve our opportunities to do good is heinous sin which Christ will severely punish. (CB)

Third servant tries to keep from losing his master’s money rather than putting it to productive use. Later, he will pay for this lack of effort. (TLSB)

**25:19** *after a long time.* The master’s departure and lengthy absence correspond to Jesus’ exaltation to God’s right hand (22:44); the master’s return is Jesus’ Parousia at the consummation of the age (24:3, 27, 37, 39). (CC)

MASTER – Jesus Christ. (CB)

*settled accounts.* The master wanted a report of how each servant had administered the funds left in his charge. (TLSB)

Because the talents were entrusted and not given, they remained the property of the master, and now he has returned to settle accounts. (CC)

**25:20** SEE I HAVE GAINED – Those who employ the blessings which God bestows in His service and to His glory, will have their blessings greatly increased. (CB)

The first servant does not try to take any cut for himself, but turns over everything to his master. Cf. Lk. 17:7-10. He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work that He has begun in them (Phil 1:6), if they cling to God’s Word, pray diligently, abide in God’s goodness, and faithfully use the gifts they received. (TLSB)

**25:21** PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF MANY THINGS – Advance to a higher station in my service. The principle here stated is perpetually illustrated in Christ’s dealings with His servants in this world, but will have its highest fulfillment at the resurrection of the just. (CB)

The faithfulness and productivity of this servant is rewarded with an even larger sum to administer. (TLSB)

Thanks for writing, and for the question. In a way, your guess is as good as mine! What I have thought, however, is that if the Day of Christ brings resurrection of the dead, a renewal of creation and the restoration of God’s plan for his created order, in some sense the original mandate to “have dominion over/for” the created order might be continued. I tend not to think of Judgment Day and eternity afterwards as an existence of “doing nothing,” but rather of being restored to full capacity to love God, and love one another and the things that He has made. (Jeff Gibbs – 6/2012) (Walter Stuenkel)

Again—it’s obviously just a guess. But it might mean that all things (including we ourselves!) will be so restored and made holy that we will always and forever do as Luther has to exhort us to do after our morning devotion: “Go joyfully to our work, singing a hymn like that of the Ten Commandments”! (Jeff Gibbs – 6/2012)

MASTER’S HAPPINESS – The greater reward for this servant is being called into the presence of his lord. This passage symbolizes the Christian’s entry into eternal life. (TLSB)

**25:22-23** The second servant produces the same margin of profit and therefore receives the same commendation and rewards. He differs from the first servant only in the that he began with fewer talents. (TLSB)

**25:23** GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT – He receives the same reward as the servant to whom five talents had been entrusted; because it is not the amount of talents given, but the faithful use of them, that Christ regards. (CB)

We suggest that the kai is epexegetical: “good, namely faithful”. In what sense is a Christian good? Not morally, because both the OT and the NT say that man is not good. Cf. Ps 14:1-3 and Romans 3:10-12. No man is good but only God is good. Mt. 19:17. Even Christians must confess that in their flesh dwells no good thing. Rom. 7:18. In Scripture only the works of Christians are called good, Eph. 2:10, not their persons. They are righteous but only by imputation. Therefore we suggest that kai in vss. 21 and 23 means “namely.” The Bible does not require goodness of me. Christ is my goodness. But the Bible does require me to be faithful. Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 4:2.

**25:24-25** When the third slave approached the master, he did so as the one who had received one talent and who remained in that state of having only one; that is

all that he had. This slave only fears his master, and that by his own admission. His response to his master (as he perceived him) was to hide what was entrusted to him and do nothing with to further his master's benefit. (CC)

The third slave appears and lays his unused talent at the feet of the master. To the readers in Matthean churches what he says to the master sounds insolent and unfair. They know from their own faith experience that their master is not a "strict Lord" who is only concerned for the interest he will earn; he is "friendly," his "yoke is gentle" (1:29-30), and he saves them as their Immanuel (1:23) when they are about to drown (14:28-31). For them the slave's outrageous language shows that he is a hypocrite. (CC)

**25:24 HAVE NOT SOWN** – Not scattered sea. This showed that he had no love to his lord, no disposition to honor him, or even to be just towards him. (CB)

Third servant characterizes his master as "hard" to blame his own failure on his master. The description has a variety of unflattering connotations: cruel, demanding, strong, or violent. (TLSB)

**25:26–27** The master responds with righteous indignation rather than sympathy. Even granting that the master was "hard," would that not make it even more urgent for this servant to produce some growth with the talent entrusted to him? (TLSB)

**25:26 YOU KNEW** – This may be taken as an argument out of the servant's own mouth. (CB)

The master's harshness, however, is simply his response to the slave who has shown himself a fool and defamed the master. (CC)

**25:27 bankers.** The Greek for this word comes from *trapeza* ("table"), a word seen on the front of banks in Greece today. Bankers sat at small tables and changed money (cf. 21:12). (CSB)

*interest.* The Greek for this word was first used in the sense of offspring, interest being the "offspring" of invested money. (CSB)

Lawful and proper increase was the meaning of this word. (CB)

**25:28–29** Most productive servant ends up entrusted with even more of his master's property, while the unproductive one loses his stewardship altogether. (TLSB)

**25:28 TAKE THE TALENT** – As he would not rightly use what he had, he could no longer have it. Those who refuse to employ what God gives them in His service and to His glory, will soon have all their blessings removed, and no more will be given to them forever. (CB)

The sentence of the master is therefore quickly passed upon him. He calls him a wicked, mean-spirited servant, one of those small souls that never rise above the dirt. The real trouble with him is laziness, together with lack of appreciation of the chances offered him. And so his one talent is to be taken from him and added to the ten talents of the one whose energy and ambition shone forth in comparison with this sluggard. (Kretzmann)

**25:29** EVERYONE WHO HAS – A disposition to rightly use the blessings which God gives is a preparation for more and greater blessings. (CB)

DOES NOT HAVE – He that hath not this disposition, when God calls him to account will be deprived of all blessings, and for his unfaithfulness will be punished as he deserves. (CB)

**25:14–30** Our relationship to God and the world is one of stewardship. We are to use everything entrusted to us in such a way that it benefits God’s kingdom. Though modern people often have far more material and technological means than any previous generation, they often use these tools selfishly. An unfailing promise attaches to faithful stewardship: if we use the things entrusted to us for God and His purposes, we will be blessed here and in heaven. • “Give me a faithful heart, Likeness to Thee, That each departing day Henceforth may see Some work of love begun, Some deed of kindness done, Some wand’rer sought and won, Something for Thee.” Amen. (TLH 403:3) (TLSB)

### *The Sheep and the Goats*

**<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ <sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ <sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not**

look after me.’<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’<sup>46</sup> “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

**25:31–46**† The great Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats (v. 32) once said: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” (12:30). The separation takes place before any deeds are mentioned. Whether a person has been against him or for him has been documented by that person’s deeds—deeds of mercy done or left undone. The merciful will find mercy in the judgment, as Jesus had promised (5:7)—and mercy it is; for the Judge buries all their failures in forgiving silence and remembers only their deeds of mercy. The unmerciful have committed themselves to the unmerciful enemy of God and share his doom, that *eternal fire* (v. 41) which God did not design for human beings. (CSB)

Kingdom of God parables are abundant in the chapters before our text. In ch 24 Jesus speaks about the signs of the end of the age. In 24:36 Jesus talks about the day and hour unknown. Ch 25 contains three end-time parables. The parable of the sheep and the goats is the last of the three. The chapter begins with the parable of the ten virgins followed by the parable of the talents. These are, of course, popular sermon texts for the Last Sunday of the Church Year. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

All of this falls within the last week of Jesus’ life. It makes sense that these teachings of Jesus are quickly followed by events that lead to his cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

**25:31** WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMES – The only element unknown to us is the time.

“Son of Man” recalls the prophecy of Dan 7:13–14, in which all nations are gathered and the Son is seated before them on his throne (Dan 7:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

*ho huios tou anthrōpou*, translated “Son of Man.” This is a self-designation Jesus uses many times in the New Testament. The phrase occurs 85 times in the New Testament. It occurs four times outside of the Gospels: once in Acts, once in Hebrews, and twice in Revelation. Most occurrences are in Matthew, with 30. Other Gospels have fewer: 14 in Mark; 26 in Luke; and 11 in John. However, the large number is indicative of a common self-description of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

In his commentary *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), Leon Morris states that the first use of Son of Man is found in Matthew

8:20. “It is a literal translation of an Aramaic expression commonly used with the meaning ‘man.’ . . . The expression has caused endless comment.” In Matthew it appears for earthly mission, his rejection and suffering, and for his future glory. “The expression was not an accepted messianic designation, which makes Jesus’ extensive use of it rather puzzling” (p 201). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The reckoning as it will finally be made is here described; for the day of doom is inevitable. Another impressive passage, awesome in its very simplicity, in the absence of all seeking for effect. He who was within two days to celebrate His last Passover on earth and then to be crucified, here fitly sets forth the glory of His triumph, as Jerome remarks. In glory, the glory of heaven, the glory of His Father, the glory which was His before the world began, before He entered into the weakness and lowliness of our sinful flesh, He will come, accompanied by all the angels, as His messengers, ministers, and courtiers. (Kretzmann)

**SIT ON HIS THRONE** – Cf Dn 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is presented as holy but never actually sits on heaven’s throne. Here, the Son of Man sits in glory as God. (TLSB)

*kathisei epi thronou doxēs autou*, translated “he will sit upon his throne of glory.” R. C. H. Lenski, in his *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943) states that our Lord’s throne of glory is at the right hand of God the Father. As the Son of Man, he made his throne of glory the cross for our sake and our salvation. Those with the gift of faith in Jesus will recognize the scope of his throne. It is a place he *vacated* to become the Son of Man (pp 986–87). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

**25:32 NATIONS WILL BE GATHERED BEFORE HIM** – The righteous should have no fears of not being included and the unrighteous will have no choice.

Every single human being who ever lived or ever will live is going to be present. No excuses, No exceptions. It staggers the imagination. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake” (Daniel 12:2). Just think what it would be like to be in the Arlington National Cemetery when Jesus comes back! (PBC)

Sheep and goats are not described as being judged on this day, but rather separated. Accordingly, this parable is not primarily about judgment but about the revelation and public vindication of true believers. (TLSB)

I conclude that “all the nations” gathered before the royal Son of Man are all the people who have ever lived on earth, with all to whom the Good News of God’s reign has been proclaimed. (CC)

**HE WILL SEPARATE THE PEOPLE** – This will be done on the basis of the faith that was given to Christians and which they retain to the end. This



separation is done before any deeds are mentioned. It is and will be a great comfort to all believers.

This reflects the fact that “nations” will not be judged as wholes; rather, the individuals within them are judged. (CC)

**25:33** SHEEP ON HIS RIGHT AND GOATS ON HIS LEFT – In the ancient world, the right hand was regularly associated with privilege or honor. (TLSB)

Those on his right are repeatedly called “the righteous.” They are believers – who else can they be? Here are the individuals from among all the nations who have become Jesus’ disciples because the Good News of God’s reign in Jesus has been preached to them (24:14; 26:13; 28:19). (This unit simply does not address the question of individuals who have never heard the Good News. Neither does it offer any support for the idea that some would have a “second chance” after death to hear and believe the Gospel or that is any loophole that would exempt anyone from participation in this judgment.) On his left, by contrast, are the people from among all the nations who have not responded to the preaching of the Gospel in faith and discipleship. They are the “accursed” (25:41). (CC)

*ta men probata ek dexiōn autou*, translated “sheep out of his right,” and *ta de epiphia ex euōnumōn*, translated “goats out of his left.” R. T. France (*The Gospel according to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985]) states that sheep and goats are hard to tell apart. The parable of the weeds in Mt 13:24–30 provides a good analogy to Jesus’ use of sheep and goats (p 356). In the parable of the weeds, Jesus uses the word *zizania*, translated “weeds” (a weed that resembles wheat), in both the parable and in his explanation of the parable in Mt 13:36–40. Sheep are an Old Testament image of God’s people. Right and left equals favor and disfavor or good or bad fortune. Jesus the Good Shepherd never uses the word *goat* in any of his other teachings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

A shepherd can easily tell the difference between a sheep and a goat. So, on the Last Day, it will be simple matter for Jesus to do the task that He declined to let His disciples do earlier in Matthew 13:28-30. (PBC)

That is the first act of the Judgment, the separating, the fixing of an impassable gulf. The sheep are those that followed the great Shepherd, Jesus, willingly, that heard His voice, the believers; the goats are those that refused obedience to His gentle rule, that were disobedient to the Gospel, the unbelievers, the hypocrites among the Christians, the entire godless world. (Kretzmann)

**25:34–40** Rewards in the kingdom of heaven are given to those who serve without thought of reward. There is no hint of merit here, for God gives out of grace, not debt. (CSB)

Your present justification is the revelation of the Divine counsel, and a preparation for future glory...Let none, therefore, doubt that he is loved who already loves. The love of God freely follows our love which it preceded. (TLSB)

**25:34** KING WILL SAY TO THOSE – Fitting title, given the coronation theme in Dn 7. (TLSB)

*blessed by my Father.*† God's work of blessing began in his creation (Ge 1:22), continued in history (Ge 12:2), was active in the worship and life of his people (Nu 6:24; Eph 1:3) and comes to its eternal climax here. (CSB)

Note the sequence: first the call to the sheep with the granting of the inheritance, and then the description of their works. Blessed is the key. The sheep are called that first, not as a result of any works, but solely because of the Father's grace. Blessed is a Gospel word, not a Law word. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

TAKE YOUR INHERITANCE – klaronomasate can only mean that they receive a gift attained for them by Christ. See Romans 8:17.

No one earns an inheritance. Inheritances are given because of who someone is, not because of what someone has done. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

KINGDOM PREPARED – St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "Your present justification is the revelation of the Divine counsel, and a preparation for future glory.... Let none, therefore, doubt that he is loved who already loves. The love of God freely follows our love which it preceded" (*SLSB*, p 155). (TLSB)

In this picture, the Judge stands out most strongly: the former lowly and despised Nazarene, now the King of glory, King of kings, and Lord of lords. This King calls those at His right hand the blessed of His Father, since they by faith received the benediction of the Father, by which all good gifts were imparted to them, and by which they became the children of God. Having continued in this faith, they are now, spiritually considered, become of age. They are to enter upon the undisputed possession and enjoyment of their inheritance, of the estate which has been prepared and ready for them since the foundation of the world, since the eternal counsel of God for the salvation of mankind was made, Eph. 1, 4. It is a kingdom which they are about to inherit, for they have been made kings and priests unto God, His Father, Rev. 1:6. And the reason for this wonderful gift? (Kretzmann)

One of endless, heavenly glory. (CB)

**25:35-36** This story does not teach that people are justified before God on the basis of works. The sheep receive their blessing and inheritance from the Father before a single

word about their good works is spoken. Scripture teaches that people do good works in God's sight only after they have come to faith and been justified by Christ. Good works are the result of salvation, not its cause. See Ap V 250–51. (TLSB)

And the reason for this wonderful gift? A reward for their faith, as shown in the ordinary, everyday deeds of kindness to the lowly brethren of Christ: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, showing hospitality to the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned; outward expressions of love flowing from the love of Christ, as an evidence of faith. Christ expects no heroic acts. He demands no miracles, but He will judge the world in righteousness, making these deeds of kindness and charity the basis of His judgment; for it is impossible to perform even the smallest act of kindness in His spirit without faith in Him in the heart. (Kretzmann)

Note the parallels to the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12). There, as here, it is the Lord himself who suffers the various deprivations, and the saints are those who have suffered with him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

**25:35** FOR I WAS – *gar* is evidential and not causal. The works of the blessed were evidence, of belonging to Christ.

INVITED ME IN – Hospitality is proof of true love.

**25:36** IN PRISON – Here it means utter destitution.

**25:37-40** The humility of the believers may cause them to disclaim any personal knowledge of Him and therefore of any personal service rendered to Him; but Christ quickly instructs them on this point, telling them that such works, done without all ostentation, without any idea of personal gain, are in reality the truest service they can render to Him. (Kretzmann)

**25:37** THE RIGHTEOUS – *dikaioi* is a forensic word. Their sins are not mentioned. Only deeds done in faith are mentioned.

Interestingly, those called righteous are surprised at what is being said about them. Far from being boastful about the good deeds worked in them by God's Spirit, they are completely ignorant of them. (TLSB)

*hoi dikaios*, "the righteous." Those on Jesus' right have already been righteous, apart from these good works just announced, by faith in Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

WHEN DID WE – Christians don't dwell on their deed of love. The Christian's whole life is summed up in "faith which works through love," Galatians 5:6. Through the Gospel he lives in constant freedom in his conscience.

Humility astonished at high honor put on poor services. (CB)

**25:38** *welcome*. This word is particularly connected to the early Christian practice of providing hospitality for traveling missionaries. Examples of hospitality are found in Ac 16:14–15; 17:5–9; 18:7–8; 21:8. (TLSB)

**25:39** IN PRISON – This held special significance for the first Christians, because so many of them, particularly their leaders, were arrested for the faith (e.g., Acts 5:18; 12:3-4; 16:23). (TLSB)

**25:40** I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – This is used of an unalterable truth uttered by the incarnate Christ.

*Upon as much as*. Means “as much as,” referring to everything that the sheep did for the least of Jesus’ brothers. It is very difficult to imagine Jesus speaking to the righteous or the accursed and telling them that how they treated individuals in their midst (or something like that) serves as the criterion for judgment. (CC)

DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST – Good deeds come one by one to one by one. Unbelievers start with the delusion of big things which attract attention but will be rejected. Believers start with little things for the least but do not dwell on them.

Important theme in Mt is that Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us” (1:23; 18:20; 28:20). This verse stresses that Jesus is with the Christian community in such a way that we serve Him when we serve others. (TLSB)

YOU DID FOR ME – Expressive of the intimate and endearing union of Christ and His people. (CB)

**25:41** ON HIS LEFT – Before God there is no predetermined “left hand” meaning eternal damnation, but only a “right hand” signifying life everlasting. It is really upsetting of God’s plan that “any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Since, however men willfully transgressed his commandments, punishment became necessary, justice must be executed. Sternly the Judge addresses himself to those at the left.

PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL – Hell was not prepared for human beings. Those who reject the Lord will go there because the wicked cannot stay with the righteous. Cf Rv 20:10. (TLSB)

God does not say “prepared from the beginning of the world.” God’s original plan did not call for the damnation of anyone. The left hand was a later addition, prepared only for the devil.

Some people will go to hell. God “wants all men to saved” (1 Timothy 2:4), but the teaching of Jesus makes it clear that God will not get all that He wants. God’s original purpose in creating hell was not to prepare a place for sinful people. No, hell was “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Nevertheless, the goats who are on the King’s left will join the devil and his angels in eternal flames. (Perhaps this explains why the goat’s head has become a Satanic symbol.) (PBC)

A fearful arraignment and a just of those on the left hand of the King: Instead of the "Blessed" which they expected a "Cursed," instead of the "Come" a "Depart from Me." Several very important points: He does not say, Cursed of My Father, for they have brought the curse upon themselves. The everlasting fire was not prepared for them, but "really only for the devil and his angels. And this fire was not prepared from the beginning of the world, God had no counsel according to which He willed the damnation of any man. They have no one to blame but themselves, this just sentence strikes them by no one's fault but their own. (Kretzmann)

**25:42-46** fearful arraignment and a just of those on the left hand of the King: Instead of the "Blessed" which they expected a "Cursed," instead of the "Come" a "Depart from Me." Several very important points: He does not say, Cursed of My Father, for they have brought the curse upon themselves. The everlasting fire was not prepared for them, but "really only for the devil and his angels. And this fire was not prepared from the beginning of the world, God had no counsel according to which He willed the damnation of any man. They have no one to blame but themselves, this just sentence strikes them by no one's fault but their own. (Kretzmann)

**25:42–43** The undone works are only a symptom of the real problem: lack of faith. If they had called on the Lord in faith, He would have forgiven them, prepared them, and completed good works in them. See LC I 191–92. (TLSB)

**25:42** YOU GAVE ME NOTHING – The humble deed of the blessed are evidence of what they are. Likewise, the total lack of even humble deeds of the cursed are evidence of what they are.

**25:44** *minister to You?* Offer service, particularly in physical needs. Cf Heb 11:6. (TLSB)

**25:45** YOU DID NOT DO FOR ME – Men who neglect the wants of Christ’s people, neglect Him. (CB)

Apart from faith in Christ and His forgiveness, all of our sins and shortcomings remain offenses against God, for which He shall hold us fully accountable. (TLSB)

**25:46** ETERNAL PUNISHMENT – The punishment of the wicked is justice because they rejected God.

RIGHTEOUS TO ETERNAL LIFE – The blessedness of the righteous is just because by their faith they are oi dikaioi.

The difference between those who are in Christ and those who stand outside of His forgiveness cannot be stated more clearly. The difference is as great as heaven and hell. See AC XVII. (TLSB)

**25:31–46** On the Last Day, Jesus will separate true believers from hypocrites and those who reject Him. The faithful will be vindicated and welcomed into heaven, while unbelievers will be condemned. Having received forgiveness through faith in Christ, God's flock eagerly await the day on which they shall be publicly vindicated and receive eternal life. • Grant us a faith that perseveres until the end, O Lord. Move us by Your Spirit, that our good works continually glorify You and benefit our neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)